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SUBJECT: SENIOR ADVISOR KRAJESKI PRESSES KIRKUK LEADERS TO BACK DOWN FROM CONFRONTATION

REF: BAGHDAD 2380

Classified By: Senior Advisor Thomas Krajeski, reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In the wake of the suicide bomb and mob violence in Kirkuk July 28, Senior Advisor Krajeski traveled there to appeal for calm and discourage provocative acts or statements from Kirkuk's Kurdish, Sunni Arab, and Turkomen communities. Security was restored quickly by provincial security forces, with strong support from U.S. troops, but tensions remain high. The precipitous and unilateral declaration on July 31 by the Kurdish-dominated Provincial Council to seek affiliation with the KRG was not helpful. Continued U.S. engagement with all of Kirkuk's communities will be necessary to avoid losing ground. End summary

¶2. (C) Senior Advisor Thomas Krajeski traveled to Kirkuk July 30-August 1 to appeal to Kirkuki political and community leaders for calm after a suicide bomb exploded during a July 28 Kurdish demonstration against passage of the Provincial Elections Law, and a Kurdish mob attacked Turkomen buildings.

S/A Krajeski pressed Provincial Council Chair Rizgar Ali; Governor Abdulrahman Mustafa; Vice Governor Rakan; members of the Kurdish, Turkomen, and Sunni Arab blocs at the Council; and the "Arab Unity List" from Hawija to refrain from provocative acts or statements. This was S/A Krajeski's first trip to Kirkuk since the July 21 assassination of Lvin magazine journalist Soran Hama. In a lunch with journalists from Kurdish, Arab, and Turkomen media, and in the meetings with the PC chair Rizgar and the Governor, S/A Krajeski stressed the importance of press freedom. Just before S/A Krajeski's scheduled departure, we learned that Kurdish bloc PC members passed (in the absence of Arab and Turkomen Bloc members) a resolution calling for Kirkuk to initiate the process of affiliating itself to the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG).

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PC Chair Says Troops from Outside Region Unwelcome
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¶3. (S) PC Chair Rizgar (Kurdish, PUK) pledged to ensure stability in Kirkuk following the July 28 bombing and mob violence. He said he is opposed to deployments to Kirkuk of security force units from outside of the province, which would be unnecessary and provocative. He said that if PM Maliki ordered troops from central or southern Iraq to Kirkuk, he would invite in Kurdish troops from the KRG. S/A Krajeski and Kirkuk Brigade Combat Team Commander COL Pascal told Rizgar that would be a bad idea. COL Pascal said he had heard reports of increased activity in the city by Kurdish intelligence (Assayish). Rizgar said that would be a mistake if true and he would work with Kurdish officials in Erbil and Sulimaniyah to have them withdraw.

¶4. (C) Rizgar said that any political agreement to distribute the top three provincial positions (PC chair, governor, and vice governor) among Kirkuk's three ethnic

groups would depend on the commitment of Arabs and Turkomen to provincial security. He claimed that failure to fully implement the provisions of the December 2007 agreement (that brought Arab and Turkomen members back into the PC) was PM Maliki's fault, saying "don't blame us, blame Baghdad." S/A Krajeski expressed U.S. concern about the assassination of Kirkuk-based reporter Soran Hama and other intimidation and harassment of journalists in northern Iraq. Rizgar agreed on the need to protect journalists and blamed general insecurity.

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Governor Wants to Soothe Communal Tensions
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¶ 15. (C) Governor Mustafa (Kurdish, independent) pledged there would be a joint investigation into the July 28 bombing and mob violence, including representatives from all of Kirkuk's communities. He said he had asked all parties to avoid making inflammatory statements. S/A Krajeski called on the governor to provide leadership at this tense time. He also relayed our concern about reports that journalists in northern Iraq have been targeted for assassination or harassment, and called on provincial authorities to protect a free and robust media.

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Vice Governor says Arabs are Marginalized
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¶ 16. (C) According to Vice Governor Rakan (Sunni Arab), Arab leaders are working to keep the peace between the Kurdish and Turkomen communities. He complained the Kurdish bloc never

BAGHDAD 00002423 002 OF 003

implemented the December 2007 agreement, which contained a formula for distributing administrative jobs, so Arabs don't trust them (or the U.S., which is viewed as biased toward the Kurds). Because of the "weakness in the city...an imbalance," Kirkuk needs a joint administration by its three major ethnic communities. He described the 2005 election as "failed," said Arab Kirkukis are second-class citizens, and that President Talabani's veto of the provincial election law shows he is not impartial.

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Kirkuk's Political Blocs: More Heat than Light
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¶ 17. (C) In a July 30 meeting with 11 members of the Kurdish Brotherhood List (KBL)) including spokesman Mohammed Kamal - S/A Krajeski heard accusations that some of the July 28 violence was caused by Iraqi Turkomen Front security guards firing into the crowd of demonstrators. The KBL members (several of whom were not ethnic Kurds, since KBL includes some Arabs and Turkomen) complained of biased coverage in the Turkomen media and claimed that evidence of their allegations could be found in footage from a Baghddadiya station cameraman. They asked that MNF/I assist in the investigation. As in all the Kirkuk meetings, S/A Krajeski expressed condolences for the victims of the July 28 violence and condemned the terrorist bombing, but called for restraint and for seeking a better understanding of what actually happened. In particular, he expressed skepticism that the Turkomen Kirkuki community would have any incentive to initiate hostilities.

¶ 18. (C) On July 31, S/A Krajeski met with Sheik Abdullah Sami and Sheik Burhan al-Assi and two other members of the Arab bloc from the PC. Sheik Abdullah condemned the suicide bombing but said he warned Kurdish leaders that the demonstration could serve as a magnet for violence. He said Kirkuki Arabs backed the Provincial Elections Law as passed by the Council of Representatives and that Arab Bloc Kirkukis even had helped draft the controversial Article 24 dealing with Kirkuk. He said Arabs would have no faith in elections in Kirkuk without a complete overhaul of the provincial

administration, since the current authorities were issuing fraudulent ration cards and could be expected to rig voter registration. He said that UN records are the most accurate and that authorities should rely on the 1977 census, which took place before Saddam's Arabization campaign. He also said that the pro-Kurdish security services would have to be reformed.

¶19. (C) Sheik Burhan called for an Arab security force to take over responsibility for the Arab areas around Hawija to prevent Kurdish abuses. He claimed that Kurdish forces fund terrorists in Arab areas in order to discredit them. S/A Krajeski expressed deep skepticism and said if there is any evidence of such serious allegations, it should be shared with U.S. military officials. If such information was not shared, we would have a hard time believing them. Another member of the group blamed violence on the Kurdish terrorist group Ansar al-Islam, and called for the introduction into Kirkuk of troops from central and southern Iraq.

¶10. (C) In a July 31 meeting, members of Kirkuk's Turkomen political bloc agreed that all Kirkuk's communities should refrain from making unfounded allegations while the investigation into the July 28 violence proceeds. They pointed out that Turkomen public statements had condemned the suicide bombing but that Kurdish statements did not condemn the mob violence that had targeted the Turkomen TV station and other Turkomen buildings. Zhala Nafitchi accused Kurdish authorities of bussing in protesters from outside the region and said that Kurdish security forces actively engaged in the mob violence and looting. COL Pascal responded strongly to criticism of U.S. forces for remaining outside the city during the demonstration.

¶11. (C) Turkomen members voiced support for the Provincial Elections Law, and one called on the U.S. to convince President Talabani to withdraw his veto because the U.S. has a responsibility to "prevent genocide." They asked rhetorically how Turkomen rights could be protected if Kirkuk was to join the KRG. One member asked that Kirkuk receive a UN peacekeeping force. Several called for the release of Turkomen detained by Iraqi security forces on July 28.

¶12. (C) In a July 31 meeting with Abu Saddam, leader of the nascent Arab Unity List and prominent spokesman for the ethnically Arab Hawija sub-district, S/A Krajeski heard allegations that Kurds are trying to subjugate other ethnicities in the province. Abu Saddam alleged that Kurdish

BAGHDAD 00002423 003 OF 003

authorities are importing Kurds to change the ethnic balance and believes that under the current circumstances an election would only marginalize Arabs and cement Kurdish control. He called for UN oversight and a transitional security force for the 6-12 month period before a clean provincial election can take place. He praised the Provincial elections bill and blamed the Kurds for refusing to cede power.

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Continuing Problems with Press Freedom
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¶13. (C) S/A Krajeski hosted an off-the-record lunch with journalists from five major Kirkuk TV stations, representing all three of Kirkuk's major ethnic communities. While there was general agreement that Kirkuk's citizens do not want communal violence, there was some disagreement within the group about where the fault lay and what MNF/I can do to prevent it. An Al Hurria correspondent criticized the U.S. for foisting the UN-led Article 140 process on Iraqis instead of letting Iraqis work out their own problems, while the Turkmeneli representative defended UNAMI as an independent mediator. All agreed that journalists in Kirkuk face the threat of physical violence and intimidation. Ambassador stressed our commitment to defending freedom of the press in Iraq, said that UNAMI is here to help broker solutions) not

impose them, and advised that journalists from all communities must do their best to refrain from inaccurate and inflammatory reporting that unnecessarily exacerbates communal tensions. The journalists expressed deep appreciation for the meeting and for stated U.S. support for an independent press.

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Surprise Unilateral Decision by PC
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¶14. (C) Just before S/A was scheduled to depart on July 31, we heard that PC chair Rizgar had called a special meeting to consider a resolution calling for Kirkuk to begin the process of applying for affiliation with the KRG. Arab and Turkomen PC members boycotted the vote, and the resolution passed unanimously (reported separately). PRT members met with Rizgar the following day to relay U.S. concerns over this unilateral act, which would have the effect of raising tensions in Kirkuk. Rizgar was mostly unrepentant, but acknowledged that a Kurdish solution that was strongly opposed by other groups would not be best. He said he is in close contact with his security officials to ensure that they protect all Kirkuk citizens, including Turkomen, so that they feel safe.

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